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ABSTRACT

Dependence is a salient quality in both sexes, although it has been culturally more acceptable for women than for men to acknowledge and accept dependency. The conflict men experience with regard to dependency and the manifestations of such conflict in dependent adult behaviors were examined. Subjects were divided into a "most conflicted" and a "least conflicted" group on the basis of conflict measured by responses to the Interpersonal Attitude Survey. All subjects completed The Assessment of Significant Relationships Questionnaire and 14 subjects also completed a structured interview. No significant difference was found between the "most-" and "least-conflicted" groups on direct or indirect expressions of dependence. The structured interview, however, revealed sharp contrasts between the two groups in terms of their perceived relationships to their parents. The "most conflicted" group identified with their father, while the "least conflicted" group identified with their mothers in terms of attitudes and values, emotional expression, decision-making, role models, sexual identification, and career choice. The findings suggest a gross misfit between personality needs, social roles, and dependent behavior. (NRB)

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ISSUES AND CONFLICTS IN MALE DEPENDENCE

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ISSUES AND CONFLICTS IN MALE DEPENDENCE

This study grew out of my interest in working with families from a developmental systems perspective.

Dependence is a salient quality in both males and females, although it has been culturally more acceptable for women than men to acknowledge and accept dependency. Women do not have a sever dependent relations at a particular stage of personality development as supposedly men do, hence, women appear to experience less conflict over dependence.

Males, however, do undergo a major shift in dependence which involves, according to traditional psychoanalytic theory, moving away from dependence on their mothers and forming an indentification with their fathers.

Although dependence is a trait that until recently has not been studied extensively in relation to normal adult male personality development, it does seem to be recurrent theme in the literature associated with early childhood development.

This study is an investigation of the conflict men experience with regard to dependency and how that conflict is manifested in dependent behaviors in adulthood.

The hypothesis tested is that those men who indicate the greatest degree of conflict with regard to dependence will use more indirect behaviors to express their dependence. Converseley, those men who are least conflicted will use more direct behaviors to express their dependency. An exploratory aspect of the study, the structured interviews, is also presented. This aspect is designed to study in more depth the parental antecedents to dependency, the repression of dependency needs

and characteristics of adult male dependence.

Three measures were used in this study:

1) THE INTERPERSONAL ATTITUDE SURVEY developed my Hirschfeld, Gough it al.

2) THE ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIPS QUESTIONNAIRE designed by myself

3) THE STRUCTURED PERSONAL INTERVIEW

The first measure, the Interpersonal Attitude Survey (IAS) was used to divide the subjects into two groups, most conflicted about dependence and least conflicted about dependence. This 48 item self-report inventory has been designed to assess individual's thoughts, beliefs, feelings and behaviors affecting their relationships to valued others.

Three major factors considered in looking at needs to associate clc ely with valued others are: 1) emotional reliance on another person, 2) lack of social self-confidence, and 3) assertion of autonomy.

The second instrument, The Assessment of Significant Relationships Questionnaire (ASRQ) is a 60 item self-report inventory designed to determine whether subjects use more direct or indirect behavioral expressions of dependence in getting needs met. Three categories of dependent behavior measured are:

1) How one gets emotional support
2) How one makes decisions
3) How one gets basic needs taken care of

The structured interview was designed to lend further support to the objective data gleaned from the two questionaires and to provide case study material.

The rationale used in designing the structured interview was that if dependence was repressed, its existence would become more apparent.

Further, it was felt that if dependence was discussed in the context of interpersonal relationships, its' developmental antecedents would be clarified. The interviews were taped and analyzed for content.

Subjects were divided into Group I (most conflicted) and Group II (least conflicted) on the basis of conflict indicated by comparison of sub-scale scores on the IAS. These sub-scales measured reliance on another person and assertion of autonomy.

After selecting groups I and II a discriminate function analysis was done to determine which items on the 60 item ASRQ discriminated between the two groups. The discriminate function analysis led to the retention of 48 items from the original ASRQ. The 48 items out of the original 60 produced a high degree of separation as indicated by the final WILKS lambda.

The 48 items found to be discriminating between the two groups were then rated by four (4) judges to determine the items which indicated direct expressions of dependence and those which indicated indirect expressions of dependence.

Finally, based on the scores of the IAS, fourteen (14) men were chosen to participate in one-hour structured interviews. These were men who showed a high degree of conflict over dependence and men who showed a low degree of conflict.

The results did not support the major hypothesis. Thirty-one of the forty-eight items were judged to be indirect expressions of dependence. An X^2 analysis found that there was no significant

difference between the two groups on direct and indirect expressions of dependence ($p < .003$).

The richest data came from the structured interviews. What was most striking was the sharp contrast between the two groups in terms of their perceived relationships to their parents.

Group I (most conflicted) clearly saw themselves as being more similar to their fathers in terms of actions and behaviors whereas Group II (least conflicted) saw themselves as behaving like and identifying with their mothers. This contrast also held true for identification in terms of emotional expression; eg., Group I saw themselves as more like fathers and Group II more like mothers on the emotional expression dimension.

The contrast extends to issues of attitudes and values, decision-making abilities, parental criticalness, who subjects talked to about personal problems, role models, sexual identification and career choice. Group I identified most clearly with the father on most of these issues whereas Group II identified more clearly with their mothers.

Although men in Group I clearly identified with at least the cultural image of masculinity, all of the men from the sample interviewed felt that they had not spent enough time with their fathers and regretted his relative lack of involvement in their lives.

It appears that the demands of the role of the independent male caused considerable conflict in the subjects. Although most of the participants were unable to identify the source of their discomfort, they were able to recognize that being totally independent and emotionally self-contained was no longer as desirable or even as possible as it had once been. Many of the subjects revealed that they had gone through periods of loneliness and alienation and had felt unable to form itimate relationships

during periods of their lives. In essence, they feared being dependent while at the same time wanted that.

The idea of their own need for dependence was a new concept for many. Consequently, many were unable to accept their dependence and continued to deny its existence. Those who could admit to being dependent were aware of the social and psychological norms of this culture that operate against such an awareness, thus, reinforcing denial.

The data suggest a gross misfit between personality needs, social roles and dependent behaviors.